

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 BEIRUT 02783 01 OF 02 180656Z
ACTION SS-25

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O R 171440Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8013
INFO USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY LONDON

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 2783

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDIP PERP MARR UN LE IS PLO SY
SUBJ: UNIFIL CRISIS: A DIPLOMATIC-MILITARY APPROACH

REF: (A) JERUSALEM 1300, (B) STATE 122726, (C) USUN 1920

1. BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY. THE PLO HAS ALWAYS INSISTED THAT ITS PRESENCE IN SOUTH LEBANON WAS NOT INCOMPATIBLE WITH "LEBANESE AUTHORITY" IN SOUTH LEBANON, UNDER THE 1969 CAIRO ACCORD. UN, ON THE OTHER HAND, PERCEIVES ITS ABILITY TO CONTROL ALL "ARMED ELEMENTS" IN THE SOUTH AS ESSENTIAL TO PERFORMANCE OF ITS MISSION. THE IMPASSE IS FUNDAMENTAL. AS URQUHART TOLD AMBASSADOR LEONARD (REFTEL B), UNIFIL MIGHT NOT POLITICALLY SURVIVE A MILITARY CONFRONTATION WITH THE PALESTINIANS. UN EFFORTS TO REACH AN UNDERSTANDING WITH THE PLO, SUCH AS IN THE MEETING OF PLO CHAIRMAN ARAFAT WITH UN FORCES COMMANDER GENERAL ERSKINE ON MAY 5 (REFTEL A) ARE FALTERING ON THE BROAD GAP BETWEEN UNIFIL'S INTERPRETATION

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SECRET

PAGE 02 BEIRUT 02783 01 OF 02 180656Z

OF ITS MISSION AND THE PLO ATTITUDE.

2. AS SEEN FROM BEIRUT, UNIFIL CRISIS HAS 6 DISTINGUISHABLE BUT INSEPARABLE COMPONENTS: (1) ROLE AND SIZE OF UN FORCES; (2) ROLE AND SIZE OF LEBANESE AUTHORITY; (3) WORLD DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT FOR THE UN MISSION; (4) ARAB DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT; (5) PALESTINIAN ATTITUDE; AND (6) ISRAELI ATTITUDE. IN OUR VIEW, ALL OF THESE

ELEMENTS ARE IN SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP TO ONE ANOTHER. NO SINGLE ONE OF THEM CAN BE SUCCESSFULLY APPROACHED WITHOUT A SIMULTANEOUS APPROACH TO ALL THE OTHERS. THE MOST DIFFICULT PROBLEMS ARE PALESTINIAN ACCEPTANCE (5), BURDEN OF WHICH FALLS PRIMARILY ON THE UN (ESPECIALLY ARAB STATES), AND ISRAELI ACCEPTANCE (6), BURDEN OF WHICH FALLS PRIMARILY ON THE U.S. THE TASK IS DIFFICULT AND COMPLEX, BUT PERHAPS NOT IMPOSSIBLE. END SUMMARY.

3. PROBLEM: ROLE AND SIZE OF UN FORCE. AS RECENTLY AS THREE WEEKS AGO, UN MIDDLE EAST COMMANDER GENERAL SIILASVUO WAS REASONABLY CONFIDENT THAT A 4,000-MAN UN FORCE WOULD BE ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY BAR A PALESTINIAN RETURN TO THE SOUTH. SIILASVUO CLEARLY UNDERESTIMATED THE DIFFICULTIES OF AN ANTI-GUERRILLA OPERATION OF THIS TYPE, AS DID THE FRENCH UNIFIL CONTINGENT IN AND AROUND TYRE. PART OF PROBLEM IS NOVELTY OF THE SITUATION FOR UNITED NATIONS FORCES, AND PART IS AN INSUFFICIENT APPRECIATION OF THE FACT THAT PLO FEDAYYEE UNITS BY NOW HAVE HAD SEVERAL YEARS OF COMBAT SEASONING IN LEBANON. UN REVISED PLAN, (RESOLUTION 427), NOW CALLS FOR A UNIFIL FORCE OF SOME 6,000 TROOPS, DUE TO REACH FULL STRENGTH WITHIN A MATTER OF WEEKS. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER EVEN THIS ENLARGED FORCE WILL BE SUFFICIENT TO THE TASK, EVEN WITH CONSIDERABLE SHIPMENTS OF HEAVY EQUIPMENT, IF IT HAS TO FIGHT.

4. PROBLEM: LEBANESE AUTHORITY. UN RESOLUTION 425, IN CALLING FOR THE UN FORCE TO ASSIST THE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES IN RE-ESTABLISHING THEMSELVES IN SOUTH LEBANON, MADE THE ERRONEOUS ASSUMPTION THAT THE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES WERE WILLING AND ABLE TO DO SO. IT NOW APPEARS THAT THE BEST THAT CAN BE EXPECTED FROM THE GOL AT THIS TIME IS DEPLOYMENT OF SOME GENDARMES TO STAND SIDE-BY-SIDE WITH UN FORCES AT CHECKPOINTS. WHILE SOME MORE SERIOUS LEBANESE PARTICIPATION AT A LATER TIME CANNOT BE COMPLETELY RULED OUT, GOL WILLINGNESS TO SEND LAF UNITS SOUTH IS LARGELY DEPENDENT ON AUTONOMOUS FACTORS WITHIN THE LEBANESE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION.

SECRET

PAGE 03 BEIRUT 02783 01 OF 02 180656Z

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5. THERE IS A SECOND PROBLEM ASSOCIATED WITH THE QUESTION OF LEBANESE AUTHORITY IN THE SOUTH: PALESTINIAN STATUS. ESTABLISHMENT OF "LEBANESE AUTHORITY" DOES NOT INEVITABLY MEAN TOTAL DISARMAMENT OF THE PALESTINIANS AND OTHER MILITIA GROUPS IN THE SOUTH. THE PALESTINIAN CLAIM THAT ITS ARMED PRESENCE IN LEBANON IS NOT INCONSISTENT WITH LEBANESE AUTHORITY IS, UNFORTUNATELY, SOLIDLY ROOTED IN YEARS OF LEBANESE HISTORY.

6. A SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM, WHILE DIFFICULT, MIGHT BE POSSIBLE IF THE UNITED NATIONS WERE WILLING TO TAKE UNTO ITSELF THE INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION OF THE RELEVANT LEBANESE-PALESTINIAN AGREEMENTS. IN SHORT, UNIFIL COULD BECOME THE IMPLEMENTOR OF THE 1969 CAIRO ACCORD.

7. IT WOULD OF COURSE BE ESSENTIAL TO DRAW A SHARP DISTINCTION BETWEEN PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN THE SOUTH AND PALESTINIAN CROSS-BORDER ACTIVITY DIRECTED AGAINST ISRAEL, WHICH THE UN MUST RESIST UNAMBIGUOUSLY.

8. PROBLEM: WORLD DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT. SEVERAL CONTRIBUTORY STATES, NOTABLY IRAN AND FRANCE, HAVE MADE THEIR WILLINGNESS TO CONTINUE TO PROVIDE TROOPS TO UNIFIL CONTINGENT ON TOTAL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL. THEIR COMMITMENT IS ALSO CONTINGENT ON THE CHANCES OF UNIFIL SUCCEEDING MILITARILY IN ITS TASK WITH A MINIMUM OF CASUALTIES. THE TASK IS TO KEEP THE INTERESTED STATES CONFIDENT THAT THERE WILL INDEED BE A TOTAL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL VERY SOON, AND THAT MILITARY DEPLOYMENTS AND PALESTINIAN ACCEPTANCE WILL KEEP CASUALTIES BELOW THE THRESHOLD OF DOMESTIC POLITICAL UN-SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 BEIRUT 02783 01 OF 02 180656Z

ACCEPTABILITY IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES.

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 02783 02 OF 02 180706Z
ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 2783

EXDIS

9. ARAB DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT: THE ARAB STATES, PARTICULARLY SYRIA,

WILL NOT SUPPORT OR EVEN TACITLY ACCEPT A UNIFIL WHICH APPEARS TO SERVE MERELY AS A BUFFER FOR CONTINUED ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF SOUTH LEBANON. IT CANNOT BE OVERLOOKED THAT THE ARAB STATES, PARTICULARLY SYRIA, HAVE A CONSIDERABLE ABILITY TO FRUSTRATE UNIFIL THROUGH ARMS DELIVERIES TO THE PALESTINIANS. CONTINUED ARAB ACCEPTANCE OF THE UNIFIL MISSION IS CONTINGENT AT LEAST ON TOTAL ISRAELI MILITARY WITHDRAWAL. (SOME OF US BELIEVE THAT ARAB ACCEPTANCE WILL ALSO BE CONDITIONAL ON COMPLETE ELIMINATION OF ISRAELI POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INFLUENCE IN SOUTH LEBANON; THAT IS THE ELIMINATION OF THE SO-CALLED "GOOD FENCE", AS WELL AS THE INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN ARMY IN THE SOUTH UNDER THE COMMAND OF MAJOR HADDAD.) WHATEVER THE ARAB BOTTOM LINE, ONLY ISRAEL CAN MAKE - OR RATHER - ALLOW, THESE THINGS TO HAPPEN. THE ONLY WAY ISRAEL WILL DO THEM IS IN RESPONSE TO UNRELENTING AMERICAN PRES-SURE. THE TASK OF AMERICAN DIPLOMACY, THEN, IS TO CONVINCE THEZ ARABS THAT WE ARE ACTING, NOT ONLY IN GOOD FAITH, BUT WITH EFFEC-
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 02783 02 OF 02 180706Z

TIVE MOVES, TO COMPEL THE DEGREE OF ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL, BOTH MILITARY AND POLITICAL, WHICH THEY DEEM MINIMALLY ACCEPTABLE.

10. PALESTINIAN ACCEPTANCE. ARAFAT IN EFFECT TOLD ERSKINE THAT THE UN OUGHT TO ASSIST THE PALESTINIANS IN SOUTH LEBANON. HIS PROPO-SITION IS OF COURSE PREPOSTEROUS BUT BASED ON WHAT MAY BE A REALISTIC ASSESSMENT OF PALESTINIAN VERSUS UNITED NATIONS MILI-TARY CAPABILITIES. THE PROBLEM IS TO CREATE A PALESTINIAN REPEAT PALESTINIAN INTEREST IN A STABLE UNIFIL ARRANGEMENT. SINCE THE PLO IS ESSENTIALLY A REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT RATHER THAN A STATE AUTHORITY, IT IS NOT INTERESTED INHERENTLY IN "STABILIZING THE SITUATION." FURTHERMORE, AS THE UN IS LEARNING TO ITS WOE, ARAFAT IS EITHER UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO CONTROL ALL ELEMENTS OF THE PLO ITSELF. TO OBTAIN PALESTINIAN ACCEPTANCE OF UNIFIL CON-TROL OF THE AREA SOUTH OF THE LITANI, THEREFORE, REQUIRES SUPER-IOR MILITARY FORCE. TO KEEP HOSTILITIES TO A MINIMUM, THE UNITED NATIONS FORCES COULD ALSO ALLOW THE PALESTINIANS CERTAIN THINGS, WHICH THEY COULD LOSE. BROADLY, THERE ARE TWO: (1) STRICTLY CONTROLLED AND LIMITED PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN THE SOUTH, IF THIS WERE AGREED TO BY THE "LEBANESE AUTHORITIES" UNDER THE CAIRO AGREE-MENT, AND (2) CONTINUED PALESTINIAN CONTROL OF CHATEAU BEAUFORT AND NABATIYAH. IN EFFECT, UNIFIL COULD DEVELOP A POLICY OF RETALIA-TION, CLEARLY RELATED TO VIOLATIONS BY THE PALESTINIANS OF THE UN MANDATE. THIS IS THE LANGUAGE THE PALESTINIANS WOULD UNDER-STAND, AND SHOULD MOTIVATE THEM TO TRY TO CONTROL THEIR OWN OUT-RIDERS, EVEN IF THEY MUST FIRST DEVELOP THE ORGANIZATIONAL MEANS TO DO SO. IN SHORT, A VIABLE SOLUTION MUST HAVE SOMETHING FOR THE PALESTINIANS, AS WELL AS FOR EVERYONE ELSE. (WHILE BEYOND THE SCOPE OF THE UNIFIL PROBLEM, IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT THE PROSPECT OF DIRECT U.S.-PLO CONTACTS COULD ALSO BE USED AS A LEVER WITH THE PALESTINIANS, IF THE U.S. IS WILLING TO PLAY THAT CARD IN THIS CONTEXT.)

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 02783 02 OF 02 180706Z

11. ISRAELI ACCEPTANCE. ISRAELI TOTAL WITHDRAWAL FROM SOUTH LEBANON CONTINUES TO BE THE SINE QUA NON OF UNIFIL VIABILITY. THE UNRELENTING U.S. DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE WHICH PRECEDED THE EARLIER PHASES OF WITHDRAWAL MUST BE CONTINUED WITH THE SAME INTENSITY UNTIL THE LAST ISRAELI SOLDIER LEAVES LEBANESE SOIL. (SOME OF US BELIEVE THAT IT IS ALSO TIME TO ABANDON THE -GOOD FENCE" MYTH IF THERE IS EVER GOING TO BE PEACE IN THE SOUTH, EXPLAINING TO THE ISRAELIS THAT THE USG SIMPLY DOES NOT ACCEPT THAT ISRAEL HAS A PERMANENT PROTECTOR'S MORAL DUTY TOWARDS THE SOUTH LEBANESE. THIS "MORAL RESPONSIBILITY" HAS BEEN SUPERCEDED BY THE UNITED NATIONS MANDATE, AND IS A VIOLATION OF LEBANESE NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY.) IT WILL HELP TO REASSURE THE ISRAELIS IF THE UN IS DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A MILITARY STRATEGY WHICH WILL EFFECTIVELY CONTAIN THE PALESTINIANS, BUT, GIVEN THE WELL-KNOWN ISRAELI DISTRUST OF THE UNITED NATIONS, THIS ALONE WILL NOT BE SUFFICIENT. SUFFICIENT MOTIVATION FOR ISRAELI COMPLIANCE CAN ONLY BE GENERATED AS A RESULT OF PROGRESSIVELY ESCALATING U.S. PRESSURE.

12. OVERALL, THE MOST INTRACTABLE OF THE SIX PROBLEMS OUTLINED ABOVE ARE, OF COURSE, THE LAST TWO, PALESTINIAN AND ISRAELI ACCEPTANCE. SINCE THE PALESTINIANS HAVE LITTLE TO BARGAIN WITH, IT IS NECESSARY TO CREATE INCENTIVES TO WIN THEIR ACCEPTANCE. WE BELIEVE IT IS INESCAPABLE THAT SOME CONCESSIONS BE MADE TO THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN THE SOUTH, PRECISELY SO THAT THEY HAVE SOMETHING TO LOSE IF THEY DO NOT KEEP THE REST OF THE BARGAIN. CONVERSELY, THE ISRAELIS, WHO HAVE MANY CARDS TO PLAY, MUST BE CONFRONTED WITH THE FACT THAT THEY WILL BEGIN TO LOSE SOME OF THEM.

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